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The New Nationalities Policy Strategy of the Russian Federation: Deepening Securitization of Identity Issues

On 25 November 2025, the president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, signed Decree No. 858 approving a new nationalities policy strategy for Russia for the years 2026–2036. Compared with previous editions, the document contains provisions that point to an ongoing securitization of nationality issues within the Russian Federation. It may be treated both as a statement of the values and goals of the Russian authorities and as a further step in legitimizing the annexation of occupied Ukrainian territory.

Assumptions of the nationalities policy. According to the framework presented in the document, the nationalities policy of the Russian Federation has three main objectives. The first is to strengthen national unity (with “nation” defined politically rather than ethnically) and to build an “all-Russian civic identity.” This latter concept includes a sense of belonging to the Russian nation and state, an awareness of the obligations that derive from this, and attachment to the so-called traditional Russian spiritual–moral and cultural–historical values. The second declared objective is to preserve the ethnocultural and linguistic diversity of the Federation. The third is to prevent conflicts based on nationality, ethnicity, or religion. The strategy is intended as a document that identifies the challenges associated with these goals and provides responses to them.

Previous guidelines and upcoming changes. The previous *State Nationalities Policy Strategy of the Russian Federation* was approved by presidential decree in 2012. It underwent major revisions in 2018 and then minor modifications in 2024. It remains in effect until the end of 2025, and beginning on 1 January 2026 it will be replaced by the new strategy approved by Vladimir Putin in November 2025. The new document introduces significant changes and places greater emphasis on security issues. A comparison of the 2012 strategy and its updated 2018 version shows a steady securitization of identity and nationality issues in the Russian Federation between 2012 and 2018. The strategy that will take effect next year underscores this trend even more strongly.

Changes in Russian nationalities policy can be seen, for example, in the definition of the *Strategy* itself. The 2012 document used a neutral definition describing it as a system of values, priorities, goals, tasks, and mechanisms. The 2018 update clearly shifted the emphasis toward security. It defined the strategy as “a strategic planning document in the field of national security of the Russian Federation.” The same definition is retained in the new 2026–2036 strategy.

Another significant aspect is the set of legal and strategic documents to which the strategy refers. While the 2012 version cited the constitution and more broadly the body of legislation governing all spheres of state activity—socio-economic, regional, cultural, migration, and youth policy—the 2018 version, and even more so the 2025 version, list security and strategic planning as their primary basis. As their legal foundation they cite the laws *On Security* (28 December 2010) and *On Strategic Planning* (28 June 2014). The new strategy for 2026–2036 also refers directly to a series of presidential decrees issued between 2021 and 2025, which shape current foreign, defense, language, and cultural policy (including the protection of “Russian spiritual and moral values”).¹

¹ See, among others, the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation *On Approving the Fundamentals of State Policy for the Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values* (9 November 2022); *On Approving the Foundations of the State Language Policy of the Russian Federation* (11 July 2025); and *On the Development Goals of the Russian Federation through 2030 and for the Future Until 2036* (7 May 2024).

The list of threats in the area of nationalities policy has expanded steadily between 2012 and 2025. Their content and position in the strategy reflect the current political agenda of the Russian Federation. The 2012 document already drew attention to undesirable cultural changes, but framed the issue as a lack of sufficient resources for fostering Russian civic consciousness, protecting the identities of Russia's peoples, and cultivating a culture of coexistence within a common state. In 2012, globalization was presented as a threat primarily to local cultures rather than to a broader all-Russian identity. By contrast, the 2018 update introduced language describing globalization as a threat not only to local cultures but also to "Russian spiritual-moral values." The new strategy expands this further by adding the "imposition of ideals and values alien to the Russian people," pointing to hostile external influence. Other problems and threats listed in the 2026–2036 strategy include: attempts by unfriendly states to stir up ethnic or religious conflict in the Russian Federation; actions aimed at weakening national unity; the spread of terrorism, extremism, and neo-Nazism by foreigners and certain Russian citizens; increasing "Russophobia" and "distortion of historical truth" internationally; and anti-Russian propaganda in the occupied (or, according to the Russian authorities, annexed) territories of Ukraine. The final threat listed is the activity of cultural NGOs, which supposedly serve foreign interests.

From peoples to nation. The new nationalities policy strategy places strong emphasis on building the unity of a multiethnic Russian nation. This comes at the expense of recognizing separate national and ethnic groups as independent actors. In 2012, one of the strategy's core values was "equality and self-determination of the peoples of the Russian Federation." In the 2018 and 2025 versions, the term *self-determination* was removed entirely, replaced by wording about ensuring equal conditions for the development of all peoples and ethnic groups.

At the same time, greater emphasis is placed on building the unity of a single "nation of the Russian Federation." Compared with earlier versions, the strategy adopted in November 2025 includes fewer explicitly stated values and instead focuses on three main areas of action. The first is "strengthening the all-Russian civic identity based on traditional Russian spiritual-moral and cultural-historical values." This is linked to three basic tasks: strengthening the role of the Russian language as the language of the "state-forming nation" (Rus. *государствообразующий народ*) and as the glue binding together the multiethnic nation of the Russian Federation; fostering a sense of national unity and patriotism among children and youth; and preserving traditional values. This last task includes, among other elements, universal rejection of "neo-Nazism" and the active integration of the population of the occupied Ukrainian territories into the Russian Federation. The protection of national, ethnic, and religious diversity, as well as the prevention of conflicts on these grounds, is included in the strategy as another set of priorities, but its placement later in the document is significant. In the 2012 strategy, the order of priorities was the opposite.

Conclusions

- The new nationalities policy strategy approved on 25 November 2025 shows that this area of state policy is increasingly viewed by the Russian authorities through the prism of security. The document contains numerous references to the need to defend against foreign influence—both passive (globalization as a threat to traditional values) and active (alleged subversive activities of so-called "unfriendly" states). Russia can be expected to intensify its rhetoric and punitive measures against states it claims are engaged in such actions. The government will also continue its repressive policies toward NGOs not linked to the authorities, including regional cultural organizations.
- The numerous references to the threat of "neo-Nazism" and the emphasis on integrating the population of the occupied Ukrainian territories into the Russian Federation indicate that the document serves not only its stated purpose but also functions as a tool for legitimizing annexation and delegitimizing the authorities in Kyiv. Approving the document during the current round of peace talks signals that the Russian authorities do not anticipate a normalization of relations with Ukraine in the near future. On the other hand, the substantial revision of the previous strategy in 2018 suggests that similar changes in language and content in the opposite direction may be introduced to the new document before it expires in 2036.



- The inclusion of numerical targets to be achieved by 2036—such as 95% of Russian citizens expressing an “all-Russian civic identity” and 85% being satisfied with relations among the peoples and ethnic groups of the Federation—may spur officials to intensify efforts aimed at militarizing and indoctrinating Russian society. This follows from the fact that, in the new strategy, Russian identity is closely tied to a conservative worldview and to a specific stance on the situation in Ukraine. Although official indicators may be manipulated (often to the benefit of both regional and federal authorities), active involvement in organizing “patriotic” events and programs may become an important criterion for evaluating officials.